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BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM MODELS: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING

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Abstract

Bilingual education remains a controversial topic of discussion in the United States locally and nationally. Issues of educational benefits need to be kept separate from political issues; both must be informed by understanding of the larger society. In this paper I describe different possible bilingual education models and comment on the educational costs and benefits associated with each.

Introduction

Bilingual education continues to fuel debate in the national as well as local arenas. Some believe passionately that use of any language other than English in the U.S. creates divisiveness; others believe that freedom to speak whatever language one chooses is a fundamental human right. Yet others feel that other languages in education are a luxury that cannot be afforded in difficult economic times. As recent demographic projections show (see editors' introduction), the number of children classified as limited English proficient (LEP) will continue to grow; thus, bilingual education is likely to continue to be a topic of debate.

In order to understand the contentiousness of this issue, it may be helpful to briefly consider assumptions and questions underlying some of the more commonly articulated arguments related to bilingual

education. First, many appeal to national unity as a prime reason to reject bilingual education. An equally passionate view relates to language rights, and notes that as the Constitution does not endorse one religion, neither does it proclaim one language. A third perspective is that bilingual education is a generous attempt to help less fortunate non-native English speakers that simply is not affordable in difficult economic times.

Common to all three of these divergent views is the assumption that bilingual education is intended to promote bilingualism, and that it does in fact produce students who are either bilingual or whose English is less developed than that of their native English-speaking peers. Both assumptions can be challenged; bilingual programs are so diverse that it is problematical to make generalizations. In fact, efforts to review the efficacy of bilingual education programs, the most famous example of which is the AIR report (Hakuta, 1986), are criticized for failure to take into account the significant variations in programs. Labeling a program as transitional bilingual education, for example, does not ensure that the program is transitional nor that it is bilingual. The students served, languages spoken, grades and ages involved, number of teachers, their specializations and languages, subject matter taught, hours in program, and so on are all variables that make each program distinct. The program descriptions in this issue demonstrate this very well.

Yet it is possible to provide a framework for systematically investigating bilingual educational programs, and it is the intent of this paper, along with the collection of papers following, to provide a framework for investigation and discussion. In order to provide this framework, I will briefly discuss a range of societal, linguistic, and educational goals and outcomes of bilingual education programs. Next, I will identify and comment on specific program models, with their typical goals and outcomes. Finally, I will review the importance of considering bilingual education programs as specific responses to local conditions, in a national context. The programs described in the rest of the papers may then be seen as variations on a particular model.

Bilingual Education Goals and Outcomes

Goals

Goals can be examined with respect to national or societal goals, linguistic goals, and educational goals. In general, national goals are of two types: assimilationist and pluralistic (Baker, 1993). Assimilationist goals seek to assimilate minority language speakers into the majority language and culture; in doing so, the minority language would become less important or even disappear. These goals characterize images of a "melting pot" culture and suggest that failure to assimilate may lead to separatism. Pluralistic goals typically affirm individual and group language rights, and are seen as support for group autonomy, which may or may not be viewed as a threat to larger group unity.

Assimilationist and pluralistic goals reflect ideological and philosophical differences; however, it must be noted that many, more specific goals, might not be identifiably either. For example, an individual's desire to learn more than one language may be related to improved job opportunities, to reinforcement of religious beliefs (Hebrew or Arabic, for example), personal travel, maintenance of historical family connections, personal enrichment, and so on. In the case of bilingual education, an important educational goal of using a minority language is to promote ability in the majority language (through transfer of skills and knowledge, improved emotional support, and so on). Thus, while considering the goals of the program type, we must keep in mind that groups and individuals, both majority language speakers and minority language speakers, will bring to the discussion group and individual goals.

Outcomes

Outcomes are typically categorized as that which results from bilingual education programs, or even from bilingualism as a result of societal forces. Wallace Lambert (1975) first identified two possible outcomes: additive bilingualism and subtractive bilingualism. Additive bilingualism is what results from a program in which students maintain their first language and acquire their second language. Subtractive

bilingualism characterizes the situation in which students lose their first language in the process of acquiring their second language. According to Cummins (1981), students who experience additive bilingualism will show cognitive benefits. These might include greater metacognitive ability and greater mental flexibility. Subtractive bilingualism typically has a negative effect on students' educational experience.

It should be noted that programs may have the stated goal of additive bilingualism, but for a variety of reasons may not achieve that goal. Furthermore, the community's support and resources may be inadequate to support additive bilingualism. For these reasons, goals and outcomes should be looked at independently as well as together.

Program Models

Submersion

The submersion model, sometimes mistakenly identified as the immersion model in the U.S., mainstreams non-native English speaking students into regular English-speaking classrooms.

The goals of this model are assimilationist; that is, the goal is to have the non-native speaker learn English and assimilate to North American society. Since the first language is not supported, it is frequently lost and so the model is also considered subtractive. Cummins (1981) asserts that subtractive bilingualism leads to negative cognitive effects, and experience shows that learners who receive neither L1 support nor ESL have a difficult time succeeding in school. Such students frequently feel marginalized and drop out before finishing high school.

Submersion is not a legal option for schools with non-native English speakers; however, oversight and enforcement are lax, and many smaller schools with low populations of NNS students are simply unaware that they are required to provide some sort of services to these students. Parents of these children, for cultural and other reasons, tend not to demand the services their children are entitled to; thus it is not uncommon to find submersion in U.S. public schools.

ESL Pullout

In this model, students are "pulled out" of some other classes in order to receive an English as a second language class. They are mainstreamed into other classes. ESL Pullout is also assimilationist in its goals, and subtractive bilingualism is the usual outcome. Students in this model may receive as little as twenty minutes or as much as several hours or more (often these programs are called language intensive) but students may still fall behind in content areas as they struggle to learn English.

ESL pullout is commonly found in areas with students of a variety of language backgrounds, making it difficult to find enough bilingual teachers and aides, and in areas where resources, particularly financial, are limited. It is also not uncommon to find pullout programs in somewhat homogeneous communities where assimilationist attitudes prevail, although it is certainly not limited to those types of communities.

The issue of which class to release children from should be thoughtfully considered; generally, it makes sense to release children from English Language Arts for native speakers. It is less appropriate to take children from content classes or from classes in which they can form friendships with native speakers of English, such as P.E., music, or art.

A related program type is the sheltered model, in which ESL and content area classes are combined, and taught either by an ESL-trained subject area teacher or by a team. These classes are designed to deliver content area instruction in a form more accessible than the mainstream. They may use additional materials, bilingual aides, adapted texts and so on to help students of diverse language backgrounds acquire the content as well as the language. Sheltered programs, or classes, are also assimilationist.

Transitional Bilingual Education

Transitional bilingual education provides content area support in the native language while teaching the student English. Initially, the learner is taught content classes in the native language, is taught English as a Second Language, and may also take music, P.E., art, and similar

classes in English, partly because these classes require less language proficiency and also because it is important that the learner know English speaking students (for language and social development). The transitional model serves as a bridge for students, helping them move from their native language to English, and any given program may do so more quickly or more slowly. Federal guidelines now suggest that 3 years is the target amount of time for learners to receive L1 support, in spite of studies showing that 5-7 years is a more realistic time frame for learners to reach levels comparable to their native English speaking peers (See Collier, 1989; Krashen et al., 1982).

The goals of transitional bilingual education are still assimilationist, and the outcome is generally subtractive bilingualism. Still, it is hoped that these programs will provide the content area support which will enable these students to remain in school.

These programs are often found in communities with significant populations of non-native English speakers, particularly of one or two language backgrounds. This makes it easier and more desirable in terms of community attitudes to find bilingual teachers. The U.S. government, through Title VII grants, funds transitional programs.

Maintenance Bilingual Education

Maintenance bilingual programs differ significantly from the previous models in both goals and outcomes. In maintenance programs, the learners are transitioned into English content classes, and are given support in their first language, as in transitional programs. However, they also receive language arts in their native language, enabling them to become literate in that language, and they continue to receive content area classes in their first language as well, so that they become literate in both languages.

The goal of maintenance bilingual programs is to promote bilingualism and biliteracy; rather than an assimilationist goal, this model promotes pluralism. Languages other than English are seen as resources. Because it promotes the development of two languages, the outcome is additive bilingualism, which is associated with positive cognitive benefits (Cummins, 1981).

Maintenance programs exist where there are sufficiently large numbers of students of one language background to make it possible to hire bilingual teachers and where there is interest and support in the community for having a bilingually educated population. While the financial investment may not be much more than for a transitional program, it is essential that the community and school staff, both speakers of majority and minority languages, support a maintenance program. It may be possible for a maintenance program to succeed with limited support on the part of the minority language community as long as the majority language speakers do not actively object. However, without support from the minority language community, such a program is unlikely to exist. There are minority language speakers who object strongly to the use of languages other than English in the public school system, and again care must be taken to address parent and community goals as an important determinant of educational goals.

Enrichment, Two-way, or Developmental Bilingual

Enrichment bilingual education in the U.S. involves not only non-native speakers of English but also native English speakers. (Enrichment programs in Canada can be immersion programs, discussed below. These do not include both minority and majority language speakers in the same classes in the early grades). While the non-native English speakers are essentially in a maintenance program, the native English speakers are in a similar maintenance program in the second language. From the start and continuing throughout, the learners serve as resources for each other. While there are segregated ESL or L1 content classes initially, the goal is to have the students of both language backgrounds studying content classes in both languages.

Like maintenance bilingual education, the goal of enrichment bilingual education is pluralistic: the development of biliterate and bilingual individuals. Both (or several) languages are valued. Outcomes of enrichment bilingual programs are additive bilingualism, not just for one ethnic group but for majority and minority speakers.

In order to ensure a balance of languages, several alternatives are possible. For example, classes taught in the morning might be taught in one language, while classes taught in the afternoon might be taught in

the other. It is recommended that the languages switch slots periodically, as students are said to be more alert in the morning. Another possibility is to teach one content class such as math in one language, and then teach the next math class in the other language the following semester. These two possibilities are identified as alternate because languages are alternated by time or by subject matter.

A second approach is known as concurrent, in which classes are simultaneously taught in both languages in a team teaching approach, where one teacher represents English and the other represents another language. In the preview-review technique of concurrent language teaching, one teacher previews the lesson in his/her language, the other teaches the lesson in the other language, and the first reviews the lesson in the first language. Unfortunately, team teaching can have several drawbacks. First, though the goal is to provide a balance of input in both languages, it has been found that English tends to dominate (v. Ovando & Collier, 1985, p 83). In addition, there can be a great deal of repetition, which may waste time. Finally, students who know they will hear the material in both languages may simply not pay attention until the teacher begins using their preferred language. (Wong-Fillmore, 1980; cited in Ovando & Collier, 1985). These obstacles can be overcome when there is a commitment to the goals of the program.

Enrichment bilingual education programs require a high level of community support and involvement, both financial and human, by both majority and minority speakers. They are more complicated to set up, and the scheduling of students, teachers, and classes requires more effort. However, the results are highly promising for those who feel that the non-English languages spoken in the U.S. and Canada are valuable resources for the future.

Immersion (Canadian Model)

The immersion model was originally developed in Canada, and was and is used successfully with English speakers learning French as well as with growing numbers of minority language children (Taylor, 1992). Though nothing in the definition of immersion bilingual education excludes minority language children, it may happen in practice.

When immersion is used with majority English speakers learning French, immersion bilingual education is generally pluralistic and promotes additive bilingualism. Learners become biliterate and bilingual in two languages. However, when minority language speakers are immersed in the majority language, the goal is frequently assimilationist and results in subtractive bilingualism.

A variety of immersion models are used with majority English speakers in Canada, from early to late total immersion and from partial to full immersion; differences in outcomes between these models seem to be relatively minor (Swain, 1978).

Again, due to confusion in the usage of the terms, it is critical to differentiate between submersion for minority students in English-speaking classrooms and French immersion for minority students in French-speaking classrooms: the difference relates to L1 or L2 oriented pedagogy. That is, "minority language students in an English-medium class with mother tongue speakers of English experience pedagogy intended for L1 speakers; hence, English is not presented as an L2, neither is pedagogy necessarily appropriate for L2 learners. In a L1 classroom, on the other hand, minority and majority children alike are not expected to speak French as an L1; hence, the program is entirely geared to L2 learning and the pedagogy is geared to L2 learners" (Taylor, 1995, personal communication).

Conclusion

Although each program is unique, it is generally possible to identify an underlying basic program model. Variations can and should occur, as a program is adjusted to suit the characteristics of a particular school and community. As the following papers show, there are as many designs as there are programs. In looking at possible models, and in reading about actual programs, the reader should be aware of the goals and outcomes of different programs, as well as the details of implementation.

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